

February 26, 2015

Dear Co-Chairs and members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of Senate Bill 398 AN ACT ASSISTING STUDENTS ACCEPTED INTO THE DEFERRED ACTION FOR CHILDHOOD ARRIVALS PROGRAM WITH THE COST OF COLLEGE. Allow me to give some background information about why I am so supportive of this legislation.

Before I started graduate work at the UCONN School of Social Work, I worked for two years at a high school in Bridgeport helping students get connected to resources they needed to succeed. One of the most common asks of students was help with navigating the college process. Almost all the students we worked with were first generation college students, all with big dreams but facing significant barriers in accessing higher education, not the least of which was the cost. For most of the students I worked with, the first step after applying to colleges was filling out the FAFSA and the combination of federal and state aid that they received made college an attainable goal for many.

Unfortunately this was not the case for the undocumented students that I worked with. Thanks to the 2011 legislation that granted in-state tuition rates to some undocumented students, college was an option that could at least be put on the table. However, even Community College was still out of reach for many of these students because they do not have access to any kind of financial aid, and scholarship opportunities are currently very limited.

This is why the passage of SB 398 is truly a move towards furthering educational equality in the state. Undocumented students that believe they have a chance to go to college are much more likely to graduate high school, increasing high school graduation rates for minority students. This directly affects one of the Connecticut legislature's big goals of working to close the achievement gap. Colleges and universities also benefit from the increase in diversity on their campuses.

All students in high school have big dreams about their futures; I had the privilege to hear many of them. Right now the dreams of many bright, talented undocumented students are not being realized because of their inability to afford college. We have the opportunity to act now to make sure that these dreams are not deferred any longer.

Thank you,

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